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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 301314Z SEP 09
FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0765
RUEHPNH/NVC PORTSMOUTH 0002
INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHIK/AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI 0014

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 ATHENS 001774

SIPDIS
DEPT FOR CA/FPP (LEDESMA-LEESE)
DEPT PLS PASS KCC WILLIAMSBURG
DHS FOR CIS/FDNS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [KFRD](#) [CVIS](#) [CPAS](#) [CMGT](#) [ASEC](#) [GR](#)
SUBJECT: FRAUD SUMMARY ATHENS

REF: STATE 57623

COUNTRY CONDITIONS

¶1. Over the past 20 years Greece has seen a remarkable improvement in its standard of living. This is primarily due to the long-term convergence plan of the European Union for socioeconomic uniformity among member states. This, together with its geographic location, has made Greece an attractive option for economic migrants of poor neighboring countries and the Middle East.

¶2. While other European countries seem headed towards economic recovery, Greece, having experienced an economic shrinkage since before the onset of the global downturn, appears to face a still deepening recession in the coming months. The economic slowdown has further highlighted chronic problems such as low wages, high taxes, unemployment, cumbersome bureaucracy, and corruption.

¶3. Generally speaking, Athens is a low fraud post. Fraud cases are overwhelmingly of third country nationals and are almost exclusively immigrant and non-immigrant visa cases.

NIV FRAUD

¶4. NIV fraud at post is relatively low. Of the approximately 40,000 non-immigrant visas post processes annually, well over 90 percent of the applicants are Greek nationals for whom the refusal rate is one percent. A 2007 validation study showed that over 99 percent of host-country nationals issued visas used their B1/B2 visas and returned to Greece within the legal time frame. A FY 2007/FY2008 validation study (completed in 2009) of NIV referral cases revealed a 98 percent return rate, with the remaining two percent deemed inconclusive. There is a lower issuance rate for other applicant nationalities including Albanians, Bulgarians and Russians. Due to their recent arrival in and weak ties to Greece, these applicants were most often refused under Section 214(b). Nonetheless, a 2008 validation study of TCNs revealed an overstay rate of 7.4 percent, which was a decrease from 11.3 percent in a similar 2004 study.

¶5. Non-immigrant visa fraud is more easily categorized by nationality than by visa classification in Athens. Post sees little employment-based fraud for Greek nationals, as Greeks are rarely interested in the more fraud-ridden visa classifications, such as the J-visa "summer-work-travel" program for jobs in the agricultural or service industries.

IV FRAUD

¶16. Immigrant visa fraud is generally seen with Nigerian, Albanian and Iraqi applicants providing false supporting documents or engaged in sham relationships. During FY2009, FPU detected seven fraudulent IV cases involving counterfeit supporting documents and/or misrepresentation.

DIVERSITY VISA (DV) FRAUD

¶17. Few Greek nationals enter the Diversity Visa (DV) lottery. TCNs from Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Albania who reside in Greece pursue DV applications in greater numbers, but frequently lack valid supporting documents. DV refusals rates are low, with most due to either to insufficient education credentials or misrepresentation. The most common counterfeit documents seen at post are birth, marriage and school certificates. During FY09, 10 Albanian DV applicants presented education credentials that were either completely counterfeit, genuine with alterations, or genuine documents suspected of being fraudulently issued by education officials. FPU Athens maintains a library of information on counterfeit and genuine documents from countries around the world. In addition, post's relationships with other fraud prevention units, especially Tirana and Addis Ababa, provide the necessary support for investigating suspicious documents.

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ACS AND U.S. PASSPORT FRAUD

¶18. Post rarely encounters fraud in the passport or ACS units. Unusual or suspicious cases of passport abuse may arise once every year or less. In a recent case of a Mexican-born Amcit reporting the loss/theft of his U.S. passport to post, ADIS checks revealed the subject travelled from the U.S. to Greece on his Mexican passport. The applicant subsequently admitted to not possessing or travelling on his U.S. passport from the U.S. and said he must have lost it shortly before departure to Greece. The case was reported to stateside authorities for their discretionary action and an S lookout [suspicious activity in connection with previous lost/stolen passports] in PLOTS was immediately entered at post.

ADOPTION FRAUD

¶19. Adoptions of Greek children by parents outside of Greece are extraordinarily rare as extended family members almost always take in children if parents are unable to care for them. Post sees approximately 2-3 adoption cases per year, and has no suspected fraud cases to report.

USE OF DNA TESTING

¶10. In the past year, post encountered one IV case that required DNA testing. Post used our panel physician and followed Department guidance for appropriate testing facilities. A second upcoming case with multiple fraud indicators may also require testing. Post has not identified patterns of groups which would necessitate an increase in the need for testing. There are no known operational concerns which might compromise the validity of DNA testing.

ASYLUM AND OTHER DHS BENEFIT FRAUD

¶11. ICE Athens has not seen an unusual number of lost or stolen I-551s, and USCIS Athens has not processed many Visas 92/93 applications. Familial relationships in most Visas 92/93 cases are documented, but in instances where document authenticity is questioned, the USCIS sub-office consults its contacts at the Rome District office and the Forensic Document Lab for guidance.

ALIEN SMUGGLING, TRAFFICKING, ORGANIZED CRIME
AND TERRORIST TRAVEL

¶12. Greece is struggling to control the ongoing influx of economic immigrants. The number of illegal immigrants intercepted by Greek authorities jumped from 66,000 in 2005, to 146,000 in 2008. While the majority of immigrants still come from Albania, Greece has witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of Iraqi and Afghani intercepts during that same period - with Iraqi numbers increasing from 1,064 to 15,940 and Afghani numbers jumping from 1,771 to 25,577. In a period of ten years, the government has introduced amnesty for legal residency twice. Although most immigrants welcomed this opportunity, those involved in illegal practices such as substance smuggling, prostitution, and document forgery have avoided this process.

¶13. The GoG announced strict measures in July 2009 for the confinement of illegal migrants in detention centers. Police contacts have advised us that this measure is purely aimed at discouraging would-be illegal immigrants from entering Greece rather than containing the hundreds of thousands of immigrants currently in Greece. The number of immigrants intercepted in the first seven months of 2009 reached just over 65,000.

¶14. Although some illegal migrants choose Greece as their final destination, many continue traveling to countries in Western Europe, Latin America and eventually the United

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States. The prevalent itinerary seen by authorities intercepting migrants at the Mexican-US border is Turkey-Greece-Spain-Mexico. Migrants of Middle Eastern descent, particularly Iraqis, used to carry the old version of the Greek passport as their fraudulent nationality of choice, but have ceased to do so with the heightened security features of the new e-chip Greek passport (see below). The new and more secure Greek passport appears to be a deterrent to smugglers who now provide travel documents of alternative nationalities such as Norwegian, Austrian, Danish, and Bulgarian passports.

DS CRIMINAL FRAUD INVESTIGATIONS

¶15. Although the Consular Section rarely encounters cases warranting DS involvement, CONS enjoys a good working relationship with RSO. Exceptional circumstances such as Interpol red alerts appearing in CLASS and suspicions of passport abuse by Amcits would require immediate consultation and intervention by DS agents. FPU and RSO work in concert with law enforcement authorities on cases involving possible applicant apprehension by police.

HOST COUNTRY PASSPORT, IDENTITY DOCUMENTS AND CIVIL REGISTRY

¶16. Greek passport issuance became more formalized and secure when the Greek police authorities assumed this responsibility from municipality offices across Greece in 2006. All Greek citizens, regardless of age, must appear before a police officer when applying for a passport. At this stage, supporting documents are scrutinized and criminal checks are performed, sometimes resulting in "on the spot" arrests.

¶17. The new Greek passport meets ICAO standards and is considered among the most secure passports in Europe. All previously issued passports were rendered invalid when the new passport took effect in January of 2006. These new passports were embedded with electronic microprocessors beginning August 16, 2006. While pre-2006 versions of old Greek passports lacked security features and were frequently altered for immigration or criminal purposes, few incidents of bio-page substitution have occurred with the new passport.

¶18. Post has no reason to believe that feeder documents such as Greek birth certificates are suspect. Birth certificate issuance by the Greek Civil Registrar is fairly straightforward: a satellite birth registrar is located in every public and private hospital where certificates are issued during the child's discharge. This information is also transferred to the city's vital records office located in every town hall. Although registration papers are traditionally hand-written in large binders, many municipalities are slowly moving to electronic records though still maintaining binders as a back-up mechanism. There is no national or centralized birth registrar database, but nonetheless, post believes fraud is limited in the issuance of birth registration papers.

¶19. The GoG recently toughened its naturalization procedures by enforcing stricter controls on document verification and applicant interviews. Legislation has now specified the criteria of age, family relations, and employment history as pre-requisites for obtaining citizenship. These measures put Greece in closer conformity to other EU member states. Post has worked with the GoG to investigate a limited number of cases with questionable claims to Greek passports.

COOPERATION WITH HOST GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES

¶20. Post has a strong working relationship with the Hellenic Police, particularly the passport issuing agency, where lost and stolen passport (LASP) data are collected on a monthly basis. Likewise, 2008 witnessed increased cooperation and communication between the Embassy and Greek Police and Coast Guard, specifically in regards to exchanging details of those arrested and convicted for smuggling immigrants.

¶21. As a result of the Greek police successfully taking on

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passport issuance, the Greek police likewise began issuing the new driver's licenses in February 2009, although the Ministry of Transportation still reviews the applications. Discussions are also underway for the issuance of an electronic Greek identity card with no specific date of production announced. Authorities are proceeding with great caution over the issuance of electronic identification cards given the public outcry about potential privacy violations. Currently, the Greek ID is a laminated paper the size of an index card with little to no security features.

AREAS OF PARTICULAR CONCERN

¶22. Post sees no exceptional areas of concern pertaining to consular fraud.

STAFFING AND TRAINING

¶23. Post is fortunate to have both DHS/ICE and DHS/CIS offices on site and the Consular Section enjoys close working

relationships with both offices, along with posts RSO. Standard operating procedures for cooperation are in place and informal discussions of relevant issues occur as needed.

¶24. Posts new Fraud Prevention Manager (FPM) is Adair Hamilton who assumed duties in August 2009. The FPM position in Athens is part-time, with the incumbent also performing regular consular functions, including adjudicating visa applications.

¶25. Fraud Prevention Unit Investigator (FPU/I), Telly Bousios traveled with the DHS Visa Waiver Assessment team in July 2009 to Chios island and to the north-eastern border town of Alexandropoulos, and took advantage of the opportunity to establish new police contacts and reaffirm ties with previous acquaintances.
McCarthy